United Nations A/AC.109/PV.1452

General Assembly

Official Records

Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

1452nd Meeting
Tuesday, 18 July 1995, 3 p.m.
New York

Acting Chairman: Mr. Bangura . . . . . (Sierra Leone)

The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.

Organization of work

The Chairman: Are there any further comments on draft resolution A/AC.109/L.1836 and draft decision A/AC.109/L.1837?

Mr. Viswanathan (India): Before we consider the solution to our difficulty, I want to seek clarification from the Secretariat about the procedure should we have to postpone the discussion. For how long can we postpone it? What are the implications of doing so? This information would be useful for us as we consider the options I mentioned this morning.

The Chairman: I call on the Secretary of the Committee.

Mr. Dmitrichev (Secretary of the Committee): Is the representative of India referring to postponement until September or postponement for a few days this week?

Mr. Viswanathan (India): I was referring to a postponement perhaps until next month, August, but before the conclusion of the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

The Chairman: I call on the Secretary of the Committee.

Mr. Dmitrichev (Secretary of the Committee): As members are aware, the Committee is to resume its session either at the end of August or early in September in order to hear the report of the Chairman on his consultations with the Economic and Social Council on the work of the specialized agencies with regard to the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The Committee would thus be meeting anyway; members could combine that item with those that would be postponed if that were the decision of the Committee.

Mr. Samadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): It will take a long time to reach consensus on these two items, and I wonder how many meetings we will be able to hold during that period, or whether the situation will be much better than the present one.

The Chairman: I call on the Secretary of the Committee.

Mr. Dmitrichev (Secretary of the Committee): Based on what happened in previous years, I believe that the Committee would have one or two meetings at its resumed session at the end of August or early in September. But this, of course, is up to the Committee to decide. Depending on the outcome of consultations, it may need more time. Then we would have to request more meetings for that purpose in order for the Committee to complete its work for this year before the beginning of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Mwambulukutu (United Republic of Tanzania): The additional information requested by the representative of India is extremely useful as we consider what steps to take. Had we known earlier today that such an opportunity existed, we might perhaps have shortened our meeting. Let us take into account the reply of the

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Secretary as we determine exactly where we are going. For my part, I can see that if there were an agreement to defer, we could use this time for negotiations or consultations, or could even mandate the Chairman to use his good offices to create some sort of Friends of the Chairman, to which we would all have access to propose amendments or improvements or other measures to be taken to enable us to arrive at a consensus. Whether or not we need to vote on these texts will depend on our progress.

Mr. Chtcherbak (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): My delegation considers the information just provided by the Secretary to be most important and useful. It gives us an opportunity for consultations permitting effective study of the situation with respect to these two draft texts. My delegation will do all it can to ensure that in the course of those consultations members of the Committee reach consensus on these issues, or at least make substantial progress towards consensus, so that at our resumed session we can adopt the documents. My delegation would request all members of the Committee to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded us by the rules of procedure to arrive at a common approach to these very important items.

As my delegation has already said, these are extremely important issues. We must not lose such opportunities to move the work of the Committee forward.

Mrs. Khan-Cummings (Trinidad and Tobago): The information just supplied by the Secretary is indeed very useful and gives us some more time and flexibility to determine how to approach our work. I think there was reference this morning to the possibility of additional meetings, but I do not think that all delegations were paying such close attention. But there is no need for haste in adopting decisions when there is clearly a feeling among some of us that we need to work on these draft texts a little more closely. I am happy to hear that we may have more time at our disposal; I hope that most members will agree that we can use that time to work on these draft texts in an attempt to achieve some kind of consensus.

If we do not achieve consensus, the option to take a vote at some time towards the end of August will still be available to us.

Mrs. Cueto (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Like other delegations, we have taken note of the information provided by the Secretary; I assure members that this morning we were aware of it. In our view, it does not really contribute anything new to the debate. In our view, solving the problem does not depend on how many extra meetings we have or on how soon we can resume our work. My delegation simply does not understand why we need to postpone the adoption of a draft resolution and a draft decision that are basic to our work, or why the fate of those texts should depend on the recommendations of a seminar, which cannot be viewed as guidelines for the work of the Special Committee.

We shall attentively follow this debate and, of course, we wish to be informed of how the decision we are taking will be formulated. The delegation of Cuba wishes it placed on record, however, that the entire Committee has decided merely to take note of the report of the Trinidad and Tobago seminar. In view of this, the Committee cannot endorse the report because there are many differences of opinion that raise questions about how we should proceed. Cuba therefore does not accept the idea that two basic documents of this Committee should be contingent on the results of that seminar.

At the appropriate time, we will keep these proposals in mind, but in no way can the recommendations of the Seminar be taken as directives for this Committee's work. It should therefore be clearly stated that the Committee simply takes note of the Seminar's recommendations. If necessary, my delegation will take part in subsequent consultations, but if we are going to meet in August we feel that we should resolve this matter at this session. I repeat that we are ready to take part in such consultations but without any commitment on the recommendations which were formulated at the Trinidad and Tobago seminar.

The Chairman: I want to assure the representative of Cuba that her suggestions are noted.

Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea): My delegation will go along with the consensus view on this matter, but I wish to raise the question of the adequacy of the timing, whether there is enough time to enter a process of negotiation. We are assuming it may take one week, but if it takes longer and we do not resolve the problem, then what are the overall implications for any later consideration by the necessary United Nations organs?

The Chairman: I hope that the Committee will consider these implications before we reach our decision.

Mr. Samadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am sorry to be speaking again. Following upon the Secretariat's answer to my question about the time of the meetings, we

are aware that we usually have only one or two meetings in August. It is quite clear to everybody that we can no more reach a conclusion in one or two meetings than we can now.

What can we do? The subject is quite apparent to everybody. Anything that we might add to it in August or September, we can add right now. We have spent so many days without reaching a consensus on even the minor proposals that have been presented in recent days. I therefore believe that nothing will change in September and that we will be in the same position then as we are now. Thus, it would be better to take a decision now. I wish to reiterate once again my delegation's position on the proposal made today by our Indian colleague that we adopt the drafts before us and that any further discussion be held during the sessions of the General Assembly and the Fourth Committee, which can guide the Special Committee's work in its next session.

The Chairman: I have listened carefully to all the suggestions that have been made. It seems to me that there is a growing consensus for a deferment of the adoption of these two draft documents to September. That may well be the case, and if it is I presume that, between now and September, we will have sufficient time in which to consult. If that is the decision, I shall definitely try to hold consultations in the hope that, come September, we will have been able to come nearer to a position in which we can agree on texts which we will then be able to adopt.

But that is just my reading of the situation as it stands. As happened this morning, situations can change.

Mr. Chtcherbak (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): My delegation fully supports such a reasonable approach. It seems to me that the recognition that we are not in a position to achieve consensus, no matter how hard we work, is radically inaccurate. We must first attempt to do so. I must say that we have not even tried to do so yet. Of course, bearing in mind the complexity of this question, time is needed, but our Committee has that opportunity now in the light of the information submitted to us by the Secretariat.

My delegation feels that we could use the time available to us to hold bilateral and multilateral consultations. My delegation is ready to work in any format and proceed in the interests of the Committee and the desire to achieve consensus. In my opinion, it is fundamentally inaccurate to say that we are unable to hold consultations now or to attempt to predict their outcome. I would tell my colleagues from Iran that God is great and we hope that we will manage to solve our problems with his assistance.

Mrs. Cueto (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Before taking or accepting a final decision on this matter, I would ask you, Sir, to reassure my delegation for the record that the negotiating exercise to be held before our next session — be it in August or September — will not be informal.

When I say "informal", I am referring to the fact that my delegation is ready to participate flexibly and objectively in any consultations. We are not prepared, however, to sacrifice the two draft documents which, for very specific reasons, have not been adopted at this session, nor to submit them to eleventh-hour consultations or to consider informal papers circulating behind the scenes. Any substantative negotiations to be held on these two draft documents will be held in official meetings of this Committee, and if it should become necessary to initiate informal consultations, these will have to be held so as to allow a substantive negotiation in which all interested delegations can participate.

We have been flexible, but, as I have already said, we cannot allow these two draft documents to be treated as they have been treated, nor will we discuss them in informal proceedings that do not allow for substantive negotiation.

Mr. Viswanathan (India): The more I listen, the more confused I get. I get the sinking feeling that we are drifting back to the position from which we started.

The Committee has been put in this predicament not by choice, but by circumstances that it did not create. I may be wrong, but I cannot help feeling that we would not achieve much by postponing action for further consultations and discussions, given the divergence of view, not only on the substance of the draft resolution and the draft decision but also on issues fundamentally about the Committee and issues that go far beyond the drafts. I feel that, even after consultations, we might not achieve something to which everyone agreed, something on which there was consensus.

As the representative of Cuba pointed out, the seminar in Trinidad and Tobago has produced new ideas and fresh approaches. However, I think we should give ourselves more time to digest these before the Fourth Committee meets in September. Given the fact that the

two corresponding actions of last year were adopted overwhelmingly by the General Assembly and that there have been no significant developments affecting the substance of the two drafts since then, my considered suggestion is that it would be in the interests of the Committee to consider adopting the draft resolution and the draft decision without amendment.

If we start to go into the amendments, I cannot see the end of the exercise. Not even three or four meetings would be enough. And I believe that even consultation spanning another two or three weeks would not produce consensus.

It therefore seems that the best way out is for us to adopt the draft resolution and the draft decision. I am not aware of many suggestions for amendment or modification. It seems that a majority of the Committee's members would be content with the resolutions that were adopted last year. I urge you, Mr. Chairman, to take this into account. I agree that some of the aspects of the drafts need to be considered, but this could be done in the Fourth Committee later. If we start that exercise we shall not be able to complete it.

In any case, this Committee has already been forced to sacrifice time. We have been placed in this difficult situation. In these circumstances we must take a difficult decision, and the best course is to do so promptly. By postponing action we would be doing nothing for the cause of the Committee.

The Chairman: I want to issue an appeal and a challenge to all members as representatives gathered here in the service of the Committee. If deferment would be in the best interests of the Committee and of the peoples who are its rationale, let us all agree to defer until such time as we are able to proceed. But if that would not solve the problem, if we would only be prolonging the endless debate — and, from the point of view of representatives, doing so would not get us anywhere — I appeal for the adoption now of decisions that we can live with.

It is a difficult choice but one that we must make.

Mr. Mwambulukutu (United Republic of Tanzania): The longer the debate goes on, the more mixed up my ideas become.

All along, my delegation was for the adoption of the draft resolution and the draft decision as they are. However, following some developments, especially this afternoon, I thought that we were making some kind of progress by which we would seek deferment of action on these issues — not postponement of the draft resolution and the draft decision. That is my understanding as of now.

My belief — and I am sure a head-count by the Secretariat would confirm this — is that this morning a majority of members favoured adoption of the drafts, leaving changes to be made by whatever procedures were available. Having listened to the representative of Cuba in particular, I thought that some of us were reaching the stage of saying, "Adoption would be the correct course. We have no problems with these drafts. We would like to have consensus. Consensus is well and good, but it is not the only way out. We would be prepared to have a vote."

But perhaps between now and August, or whenever we will be looking at issues relating to consultations with the Economic and Social Council, we could undertake that assurances would be given in respect of all the considerations, especially those raised by Cuba — assurances that nothing would be watered down or thrown out. We do not have to keep repeating ourselves. The draft resolution and the draft decision are very important, and they are not as controversial as some people suggest. We all agree that they are serious and important measures, so we have only to engage in genuine discussion and consultations that will not minimize their importance.

I am amenable to our deferring action — not postponing the draft resolution and the draft decision — if that is acceptable. We are approaching a late stage and can be sure that these items will not just be thrown away.

With that, I hope that we can proceed.

Mr. Chtcherbak (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): My delegation supports the proposal that has just been made by the representative of Tanzania and has been put forward by other delegations. In my view, the Committee would be making a big mistake if it were to base its approach simply on somebody's gut feeling when taking such an important decision.

As we have already said, we must start by working together on the draft texts; only through that process can we try to achieve some kind of mutual understanding. My delegation feels it would be a mistake for the Committee not even to try that approach. Once again,

then, we earnestly entreat our colleagues to take advantage of the opportunity before us today. We can try any format for our work, bearing in mind the approach suggested by the Cuban and other delegations. At the resumed session we could perhaps extend our work by one day in order to achieve a final decision. I ask members to remember that we can always resort to a vote; but the opportunity for serious consultations will not always be available. We could lose that chance without knowing whether we will have such an opportunity again in the foreseeable futu.e, for we all know that there will be no opportunity in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) to discuss these draft texts in any detail: the volume of documentation to be got through is too great.

Here, on the other hand, are gathered members who have worked on these issues and know them well. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) is a far broader forum, where it will be much more difficult to discuss these issues — and even more so during the General Assembly session. We know from past experience that in the General Assembly it is just a question of voting. Why should we resort to a vote before having exhausted all other possibilities?

Again, we earnestly entreat members of the Committee to approach this issue seriously. Our view, like that of the Tanzanian delegation, is that we are not postponing the discussion to the distant future, certainly not forever. We are simply trying to create an opportunity for some additional input.

Mrs. Cueto (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Without wishing to encroach upon your prerogatives, Sir, I should like to propose that we look at the two options you have set out: deferring the debate to the next session; or taking a decision on these two documents and passing them on to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) for further consultations, as proposed by the representative of India.

With a view to helping in the adoption of a final decision and finishing this discussion, each delegation might state its preference between those two options so that we can get a clear idea of the Committee's final position. Otherwise, we will all be stating our individual views.

We think there are two clear options: either we adopt the two draft texts and pass them on to the Fourth Committee, as proposed by the representative of India, or we defer the discussion.

Perhaps, Sir, you could indicate what course the Committee should take.

Mr. Al-Attar (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It is our duty to find a realistic solution to this problem. In my view such a solution would be in line with what has been proposed. If we want to amend the draft resolution and the draft decision, it should be with the intention of encouraging countries to cooperate with the Special Committee. If we do not succeed in establishing a relationship of cooperation with these countries, we can never reach our goals.

To me, the solution is clear and straightforward. As proposed by the representative of India, we should discuss the two draft texts, bearing in mind the concerns of the delegation of the Russian Federation. The Chairman had suggested holding consultations with administering Powers before taking a final decision. If those countries want to cooperate with the Committee, the Committee will be flexible and will accept changes — provided that cooperation continues. But if those countries refuse to cooperate with the Committee, why should we delay a decision on these texts? What would be the point?

After the tangible success that has been achieved in the past, we members of the Committee cannot start to change the mandate of the Committee when results are not achieved. We need to be flexible, but they need to be flexible as well, and to prove their good faith. Our work at this session has been very different from that of previous sessions; we have shown great flexibility, both during our meetings and outside them. I think that is sufficient: before we go any further we need to be very clear about our goals. There have been attacks on this Committee; there are many who would be delighted to terminate its mandate before it achieves its objectives.

In short, I support the proposal made by the representative of India.

The Chairman: Let me point out that when reference has been made to consultations, these have been consultations within the Committee. There has been no intention to consult with administering Powers, nor was any reference made to such consultations.

Mrs. Khan-Cummings (Trinidad and Tobago): I support the position of the United Republic of Tanzania and the Russian Federation, because I think deferment would probably be the best course and would please most

members of the Committee at this time. We need to give ourselves more credit; if we have more time, we should use it to achieve consensus. We should not prejudge what the outcome of such consultations would be. I agree with the representative of Cuba that, if there are consultations, they should not be informal, but should be within some sort of formal structure, perhaps a working group in which we could work together to thrash out our differences. But I think we really should give ourselves some more time.

While my delegation has no problem with the substance of these texts, we do have a little problem with the language. As we have said, we should take the international political climate into consideration. We should make a realistic assessment of what the current international political climate is, and we should not be using cold-war language or the language of the 1960s or the 1970s. We should make an attempt to reflect the thinking of delegations, and, more important, the interests of the peoples themselves, whose interests we should really be addressing, and not so much the positions of members of the Committee.

Representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories presented their positions at the Trinidad and Tobago seminar. Clearly, the positions they presented are not all in keeping with resolutions the Committee has adopted. We should take into consideration the interests and feelings of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

After all, those are the interests that this Committee should be addressing. If we run ahead and take decisions based on our own positions, without thinking of the peoples themselves, I think that in a sense we might be changing our own mandate.

I believe that we should give ourselves some time to reflect the thinking of these Non-Self-Governing Territories — what their interests are, what does and does not please them, what the situation on the ground is, and so on. This information has to be reflected in the resolutions. We accept the same resolution from year to year without much change, but sometimes the changes could be minimal but subtle, and those should be reflected. We cannot assume that because no major changes have taken place, the resolution should remain the same. Even though the changes may be slight, to reflect them might be the beginning of some future development.

The Chairman: Before I proceed, permit me to summarize the discussions thus far. I take it that I am right and that, as I said earlier and as supported by the delegation of Cuba, it is now a question of determining whether to defer adoption of the drafts or to adopt them today. I appeal to representatives to address only these two issues. I think all the positions have been clearly stated, so representatives can help the Chair arrive at a consensus by addressing these two issues only.

Mr. Al-Attar (Syria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I asked to speak, Sir, before you specified the issues we should decide, but I wish simply to make a clarification.

When we asked the Chairman to conduct consultations, we did not mean that they should be conducted among members of this Committee. The positions of the countries represented in this Committee are well-known, and if some simple amendments are submitted by Committee members who do not vote against the draft resolution, then this is not a matter that requires consultations. The Chairman should consult with other States, not members of the Committee, as our positions are clearly defined. Some States require to make radical changes, which others would not accept.

The purpose of the consultations with non-members of the Committee is to change the result of the voting in the Fourth Committee. We have to work as one unit. Our goal is to support and consolidate the work of this Committee and to interact with other States, not to minimize the differences between us. Our positions are well-known, as is our voting record, and I hope that we can consider this question very carefully. We do not need any consultations among the member States of this Committee, all of which have expressed their views here or in consultation with other States before the session of the General Assembly. Our debate should reflect this.

The Chairman: If there were no need for consultations, I am sure that this meeting would have ended a long time ago. The fact that we are being held up by the two remaining issues after reaching consensus on all the others means that there does exist a need for consultations within the membership of the Committee. Had we been able to agree, this meeting would certainly be over by now.

Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea): Mr. Chairman, you have asked us to state our position on the issues before the Committee.

Having heard the views of other delegations, Papua New Guinea will go along with the suggestion made by the representative of Tanzania. Technically, he is

recommending that we defer taking action on the two drafts, which is very important. We would also raise the question of adequacy of time. As there seems to be time for consultations, we would be in favour of them so that we can study the drafts. If any amendments are proposed, I think they should be properly and adequately discussed before we take action.

Early on, we said that we would go with the consensus. But there does not seem to be one, and since the Chairman asked each one of us to state our position, I have given ours. We will go along with the deferment in order to have the time to go through the language. This language suits my delegation, if we look at it from our perspective. On the questions of military presence and foreign economic dominance, we will go along with the drafts, but we are aware of the fact that other Territories have a different point of view and that their perceptions and realities must be taken into consideration. This is very critical, given the practical situation and the particular nature of those Territories. We are aware also of the situation of Gibraltar, which may take a different position, and of the situation of the Falklands, which will have yet another stand. Due to their circumstances, New Caledonia and Guam would support the draft resolution before us. On that understanding, I am in favour of allowing time for consultations.

The Chairman: The representative of Papua New Guinea supports the suggestion, made earlier by the representative of Tanzania, to defer action, but not to postpone consultations, on the draft resolution.

Ms. Yao Yuhua (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): With regard to the draft decision and the draft resolution before us, the Chinese delegation is willing to join the consensus. We have no difficulty with regard to the draft resolution proposed by the Chairman, but since the Russian delegation and others would like to postpone taking action on it, we support this deferment.

I should like also to know how late this deferment can be. If the Secretariat says that we can wait until next week, then we would like to hear and consider the views of those delegations that have different positions. However, if we cannot reach a consensus but can still have the option of voting, we would like to defer taking action.

The Chairman: If I understand correctly the representative of China, she is in favour of deferring action but not of postponing consultations.

Mr. Mwambulukutu (United Republic of Tanzania): As my delegation stated earlier, we have no problem with either of the two drafts in question. But some difficulties do arise if it is a question of a straight choice between adoption and deferment; I would then choose adoption. I think that in the interest of everything we have been saying here, we could allow time for consultations so that we can defer taking action on these issues until we are ready to do so. Yes, we do want consensus, but that does not rule out voting. We are neither here nor there.

The Chairman: My understanding of the position of the representative of Tanzania is that he is sticking to his initial position of deferment of action but not postponement of adoption. Is that correct?

Mr. Mwambulukutu (United Republic of Tanzania): Provided that the vote is not about —

The Chairman: Let us not talk of votes at this stage.

Mrs. Cueto (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): As our debates proceed, my conviction strengthens that your decisions, or your interpretations, are sometimes very timely. Perhaps that is even more the case in the light of what the representative of Tanzania has just said in his request. Regrettably, this does not change Cuba's position. There are two options, and the one that we favour is adoption of the draft resolution and the draft decision.

The Chairman: The representative of Cuba is in favour of adoption.

Mr. Samadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation too is in favour of adoption. However, as English is not my mother tongue, I wish to seek clarification.

I do not know the exact difference between deferring action and postponing adoption, and I should like to be quite clear about it.

The Chairman: What is intended is that the draft resolution and the draft decision be adopted in principle but that their implementation be held in abeyance until such time as members of the Committee have agreed definitively that they may go into effect — that is, allowing an opportunity for consideration of the various amendments for which we do not have time now.

I hope that my interpretation captures the essence, at least, of what members intend. Does it help?

Mr. Samadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): So we are going to adopt the draft resolution and the draft decision?

The Chairman: If that is the consensus, yes. I am just gathering the views of members. What is the position of the representative of Iran?

Mr. Samadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation is in favour of adopting the drafts that are before the Committee.

Mr. During (Sierra Leone): My delegation is also in favour of adoption.

Ms. Yao Yuhua (China) *(interpretation from Chinese)*: I should like to have a point clarified. The Chinese delegation has no problem with the draft resolution and the draft decision, but deferment of their implementation would take account of the wishes of those delegations who believe that consultations are necessary. If my understanding is correct, the other possibilities are adoption by consensus or adoption by voting.

The Chinese delegation agrees that action should be deferred. Several delegations have indicated that they need some time for consultations, and the delegation of the Russian Federation has said that time is required for the clarification of its proposals and amendments. Whether those proposals are acceptable to other delegations is another matter, but at least there would be time for them to be made. The Committee could meet again after consultations, or we could have informal consultations, but if the consultations did not produce consensus the draft resolution and the draft decision could be voted upon.

If my understanding of deferment is correct, the Chinese delegation is willing to have action deferred. However, there should be a time limit — probably the end of this week or some time next week. There should not be an indefinite delay.

The Chairman: The comments of the representative of China give us an opportunity for clarification. May I interpret?

The draft resolution and the draft decision are accepted in principle, but action is deferred. If consultations are successful, implementation will take place, subject to the time limit agreed. Otherwise, as was suggested by the representative of China, the drafts should be put to the vote.

Is that correct?

Ms. Yao Yuhua (China) *(interpretation from Chinese)*: That is correct.

Mr. Viswanathan (Indonesia): My delegation too can go along with the draft resolution and the draft decision. We have supported corresponding drafts in the past, and we are prepared to support what is before the Committee now.

However, as you, Mr. Chairman, have put two options to the Committee, I should like to repeat that our preference is to have the Committee's work completed today. The drafts could be adopted on the understanding that, if necessary, we could return to them.

The Chairman: It seems that we have reached consensus that the drafts be adopted rather than postponed, but that action on them be deferred.

Mr. Ratunaceva (Fiji): My delegation wishes to join the consensus on deferment of action. We do not have any problem with regard to the draft resolution and the draft decision.

The Chairman: It seems that my interpretation is correct.

Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea): I wonder whether the question raised by the representative of the People's Republic of China has been adequately answered.

Our understanding is that the purpose of deferring action is to allow time for negotiation and that, in the event of failure to reach agreement, we shall consider voting or otherwise resolving the matter. Is our understanding correct?

In your summing up of the situation, Mr. Chairman, you have said that the drafts will be adopted in principle until such time as negotiation produces some compromise.

I am not sure about the position now. We need proper clarity on the question raised by the representative of the People's Republic of China.

The Chairman: I believe the representative of China agrees with me when I say that the draft resolution and the draft decision should be adopted in principle, but that if the Committee so agrees, action should be deferred until such time as negotiations conclusively and definitively prove that there is general agreement on those points.

Ms. Yao Yuhua (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): With regard to the question put forward by the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea, I should like to raise the same question. That is to say, if we are going to defer, how long will we defer until we finish and can take action?

The Chairman: The question now is, what is the wish of representatives? How much time do they need or want? It is my task to get a sense of what representatives wish and transmit it, so at least we know that what we agree on is what everybody wishes.

Mr. Viswanathan (India): I have a small suggestion. If we could suspend the meeting for about five minutes or so, we could have consultations and I think then we would be able to respond to the Chairman's question.

Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea): I acknowledge the point raised by the representative of India, but I believe we can take a decision now. I think that the time limit should be set around August; this would provide enough time for us to consult each other on the matter and take action before the fiftieth session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Chtcherbak (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): From the point of view of our delegation, the best possible time frame would be the time before our resumed session, since in any case we will have a session of the Committee at which we will consider the questions related to cooperation with the specialized agencies of the United Nations. Before that, we have sufficient time to carry out consultations and endeavour, as we have already said, to work out a text acceptable to all.

The Chairman: If that is the wish of representatives, we will therefore adjourn for five minutes.

The meeting was suspended at 5.05 p.m. and resumed at 5.20 p.m.

The Chairman: I request the representative of Papua New Guinea to communicate the outcome of the consultations.

Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea): Most representatives think that we should defer taking action on the two drafts before the Committee. This deferment would give Committee members time to consult with each other on any proposed amendments. If any amendments are accepted by consensus, a new version of the draft resolution will be submitted to the Committee. If no consensus is achieved on the amendments, however, then the Committee will reconvene to consider the proposals now before it for its consideration. That is my general understanding of the position of most Committee members.

Representatives would like also a definitive time frame, and they believe at least a week is needed for the consultations to be conducted. It has been proposed also that these consultations be open-ended so that all representatives can participate.

The Chairman: My attention has been drawn to a technical matter — that instead of the word "defer", we should say "postpone".

Are there any comments on the outcome of the consultations?

Mrs. Cueto (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I shall be very brief. Our interpretation of the technical meaning of not taking action at a specific time on a draft text corresponds exactly to the one put forward by the representative of Papua New Guinea.

As we have before us two drafts, we feel that one week — two at the most — would give us ample time to hold consultations. That is why we should decide specifically when our meeting will be held, and this should be no later than the first week of August.

If we do not reach agreement or consensus on certain amendments — and we reiterate that the text of the two drafts before us constitutes the basis for our negotiations — then we would be meeting only to take a decision on those two drafts.

Mr. Al-Attar (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I understand that the Committee will meet at the end of July or the beginning of August. I have a question: if we do not have the quorum to meet at that time, when will we meet? It has been difficult enough to hold a Committee meeting this month because of the lack of a quorum, so if we take into account the fact that in August most of the representatives probably will be

elsewhere, then what is the solution? How do we deal with that?

The Chairman: I hope that Committee members will address the question posed by the representative of Syria.

Mr. Chtcherbak (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): This interpretation of the compromise, as outlined by the representative of Papua New Guinea, is in principle acceptable to us. We understand it in very simple terms, namely that on the substance of the matter we postpone taking a decision on the draft texts in order to allow time for additional consultations. That is a step in the right direction, and I think all delegations will endeavour to make the most of that opportunity.

As I understand it, the representative of Papua New Guinea is saying that if we do not achieve consensus in the process of consultations, then automatically we would revert to the old draft, which would then be put to the vote. In principle, we agree with that also, because, as we have no other draft, that situation would be identical to the one we have today. But at least we would have time to hold consultations.

I do not believe that it will be difficult to have a quorum in August, since by that time either consensus will have been achieved or a vote will simply be taken. For such highly qualified diplomats, this will not require much work. This can be done also by qualified people in the missions, so I do not think there will be a quorum problem, because there should be at least one diplomat left in each mission at that time; none of them will be left completely unattended.

Hence, mustering a quorum should not present a major problem. But I would like to ask delegations to take a realistic approach to establishing a time frame. These are complex questions; there are 24 members of the Committee, all of whom must be consulted, perhaps more than once, which will take some time. My delegation urges members to take that into account in establishing when we are to take a decision on the draft texts. As representatives have rightly stressed, this should be no later than our resumed session, but not too long before it, to give us at least three weeks for consultations. From the standpoint of principle there is little difference between three weeks and two, but from the practical point of view it affects the consultations, as members have extensive obligations other than their work in the Committee; it would be desirable to have as much time as possible so that the consultations are not carried out in haste but are painstaking and detailed.

The Chairman: Once again, I appeal to members to be brief and to the point, given the limited time we have at our disposal.

Mrs. Khan-Cummings (Trinidad and Tobago): I just wanted some clarification with respect to the question of the quorum, which is a concern of mine. I recall that when we first spoke of having an open-ended working group the Secretariat informed us that there was no need for a quorum in such a group. Perhaps the Committee could establish an open-ended working group; I am sure that interested delegations would make it their business to attend, so that we could come up with some kind of revised draft texts. That would eliminate the need for a quorum.

The Chairman: I call on the Director of the General Assembly Affairs Division.

Mr. Perfiliev (Director, General Assembly Affairs Division): I have just returned from a meeting of such a working group. The membership of an open-ended working group is variable, so we are never sure how many will attend a given meeting. But of course the purpose of a working group is to prepare a decision for a body, and during the discussions in the working group, with the participation of the various geographical groups and so forth, it is possible to see when a decision is close to consensus for the entire membership. So when the decision goes to the full committee, the members are more or less sure that there is something like general support for that decision.

Mr. Viswanathan (India): When we talk about quorums, we are not worried about the quorum in the open-ended working group; we are concerned with the quorum in the meeting in which we adopt the draft texts. If we lack sufficient members, then we will be in a more difficult situation than the present one. That is the concern that was expressed by the representative of Syria. I think one way to deal with this problem might be to fix a date now on which we are going to meet to adopt the draft texts so that people can plan to attend the meeting.

Our colleague from the Russian Federation suggested that there was no difference between two weeks and three; I would prefer two weeks. If we could meet by 1 August, assuming the availability of services, we could fix that date now, planning for two meetings in case we need them. If it is clear that the purpose will be

adoption only, not discussion, then we could plan for one meeting. But let us decide on the date now.

Mr. Samadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am happy that we are reaching consensus on procedure; I appreciate the efforts of the Chairman and our other colleagues. I think that the suggestion regarding the two-week period and making clear the exact date of our meeting would be helpful to ensure a quorum. At least everybody who is at the meeting will participate. I just wanted to clarify one thing. When we resume, will we have the two draft texts before us and another that is the object of consensus, or only the two current draft texts? If there is going to be a vote, it would be on these two texts, not on anything issuing from the consultations. The result of the consultations can be only a consensus.

Mr. Chtcherbak (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): I think the representative of India may have slightly misunderstood me. What I meant was that there was no difference between two weeks and three as regards the adoption of a resolution. But as far as consultations is concerned, there is quite a big difference. My delegation would like there to be a reasonable period, bearing in mind the views of other members. Given the issues that need to be discussed, we really think that a little more time would be appropriate.

Mrs. Cueto (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Let me echo the statement of the representative of Iran: if there is no consensus text — which should be based on the two draft texts before us now — we would be meeting to take action on the present draft resolution and draft decision.

In our view we have been involved since Friday in negotiating under pressure, and we have been flexible. We have two draft texts; many delegations have said they can accept them. Now we are being asked for more time — more than is necessary — for consultations. My delegation considers that two weeks is enough. We would be willing to accept the first few days of August as the date of our next meeting.

The Chairman: The majority view seems to be that we should reconvene in two weeks.

So, depending on the availability of services, a meeting should be held during the first week of August at a date to be confirmed.

Mr. Mwambulukutu (United Republic of Tanzania): I have been consulting with the representative of Syria concerning the question of a quorum. While the Secretariat is looking for the exact date on which to hold consultations during the second half of August it might be convenient to hold the formal meeting during the first week of September when almost everybody will be available.

The Chairman: A new dimension has been added. If no other representative wishes to speak, may I take it that the Committee agrees to the suggestion of the representative of Tanzania?

Mr. Samadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation prefers that we adhere to the consensus we reached on holding the meeting during the first week of August and we believe we will have a quorum. However, if we find we do not, and since we have to hold a meeting, we could discuss the matter at that time. But we have fixed 1 August as the date for the meeting.

The Chairman: It does not seem that at this point we can confirm the first week in August because that seems to be the busiest period. I do not feel that a week will make a difference. We need conference services, and if they cannot be guaranteed during the first week of August I would suggest that we opt for the second week.

Mr. Viswanathan (India): We are flexible, depending upon the facilities available.

Before we conclude today's discussions, I should like to propose an amendment to the Subcommittee's report even though the report has been adopted. There is a factual inaccuracy in the matter of the United States Virgin Islands. It is only a factual point, not a value judgement. Clarification of this information was presented during the Trinidad and Tobago seminar and I mentioned it during one of my interventions in the Committee's meetings. If you will permit me, I should like to propose a small amendment.

The Chairman: If it is question of fact, and since it does not really affect the substance of the report, would the Committee agree that the change be communicated to the Secretariat? Of course, the Committee should also be informed as to what the change is. I wish to avoid the slight possibility that that would open the door for more debate, however, since what is presented as a fact can easily be interpreted as a value judgement. Therefore, if it is simply a correction of a fact I would suggest that the representative of India convey that to the Secretariat to be taken care of.

I thank the representative of India for his understanding. The change will thus be issued in the form of a corrigendum.

Mrs. Cueto (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): May we conclude this meeting with the certainty that our next meeting will take place in the second week of August?

The Chairman: The Secretariat is looking into possible dates and it seems that the second week is possible. When the date is confirmed we will inform the members of the Committee.

Mrs. Cueto (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Before we conclude the meeting, Cuba would like once again to point out that in a spirit of contributing to the work of the Committee and the smooth discharge of its mandate, we have been dealing with procedural issues for some days now, and have experienced some delay.

We believe the Secretariat should have drawn the attention of the Committee to the late submission of the two drafts now before us. As we have repeated on previous occasions, this has given rise to debates and has caused us to sacrifice the drafts despite our extreme flexibility. Even today, when we took the decision to postpone the debate on these two drafts to a later occasion, we still do not know, unfortunately, if conference services will be available for our meeting in August.

We would also like to point out, so that the Secretariat will take due note of the decisions taken by the Bureau of our Committee, that we would have liked to distribute to all members of the Committee document A/50/263, dated 29 June 1995. This document appears under item 121 of the provisional agenda of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly. In section III of the annex, our Committee puts forth a recommendation concerning the pattern of conferences under the heading "Letter from the Secretary of the Committee" — the Special Committee — which states the following:

> "The matter was raised at a Bureau meeting of the Committee on 30 January 1995 during which members unanimously agreed to maintain the practice of recorded meetings for the 1995 session, following the recommendation made by the Working Group contained in the report of the Special Committee adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session (A/49/23 (Part I)).
>
> "At the same meeting, the members of the Bureau also decided to review the question again in 1996." (*A/50/263, Annex, section III*)

In addition, the report of our Working Group recommended the retention of verbatim records.

Of course, the delegation of Cuba respects the right of any delegation to submit an opinion. However, if we are concerned about the credibility of our Committee, then when some member of this Committee overlooks a fact, the Secretariat or the party concerned should continue to abide by the decisions that are taken and that are officially submitted to the competent organs of the Organization.

The Chairman: Let me unreservedly apologize for any difficulties that have arisen as a result of the unanticipated transition. I want to assure members that I will make every effort to ensure that we do all that is possible to serve the interests of the Committee and those peoples whose interests are under consideration here, as we hold the fort until next year. Whatever difficulties we may have had, I hope members will continue to show understanding and tolerance.

Except for the items relating to the specialized agencies, foreign economic interests and military activities, the Committee has concluded its consideration of the items on the agenda. The next meeting of the Committee will be announced in the *Journal*.

Mr. Al-Attar (Syria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Given that we have finished the work of our Committee, I should like to take this opportunity to thank you, Sir, for the considerable efforts which you have been coordinating in order to achieve consensus at this stage. I should also like to thank the Secretariat for the work it has done. We can see from their faces how tired they are, because they, too, have put a considerable amount of effort into this work.

It is true that there are still differences of opinion about the work of this Committee, and this is perfectly normal. Such things happen. But our goal is to keep moving forward, and it is our hope that future meetings will be easier than the one we have just had.

In view of your wisdom and your very capable coordination of the work, Sir, we are sure that future meetings will be a resounding success.

Mr. Chtcherbak (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): I should like to add my voice to the words which have just been spoken by the representative of Syria. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea): Mr. Chairman, I should like to echo the sentiments expressed by the representatives of Syria and the Russian Federation, and to add my compliments for your efforts and your leadership in guiding the proceedings of this Committee to their conclusion. I wish you all the best in the discharge of your responsibilities for the remainder of the session.

Mr. During (Sierra Leone): I would be failing in my duty not to add a word to what my colleagues have just said.

Notwithstanding the fact that we have postponed the resolution of two issues until August, I wish to extend to you, Sir, the deep gratitude of the Sierra Leone delegation for the very competent manner in which you have conducted these proceedings. As a Sierra Leonian, I am very proud. I wish you luck in all your endeavours.

Ms. Yao Yuhua (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): I should like to join other delegations in thanking you, Sir, for accepting, in this difficult time, the duties of Acting Chairman and for exercising your wisdom in guiding the work of this Committee.

I should also like to thank the ladies and gentlemen of the Secretariat. We know that since the seminar in Port of Spain they have been working very hard. We would like to thank the technicians and verbatim reporters and others who have assisted us in our work.

In addition, I should like to appeal to all the members of the Committee to carry out consultations before the start of the next meeting so that the spirit of consensus can prevail. We hope that we can achieve success in the consultation process.

The Chairman: I call on Mr. Perfiliev.

Mr. Perfiliev (Director, General Assembly Affairs Division): We shall do our best to continue providing the Committee with all its working papers on time. I think that has been the case for this session, not only for this Committee but also for the Subcommittee on Small Territories.

As for the draft documents, we shall continue to provide all the support material needed by the Chairman or delegations, but we shall of course expect the prompt presentation of the drafts by the delegations themselves — by one delegation or a group of delegations — after which we shall expect some other delegations perhaps to be added to the list of sponsors, so that these drafts can be ready on time in all languages for the Committee's sessions. As for any draft resolution which the Chairman himself might prefer to submit, as I said, we shall of course try to help him with all the support material, but it will be his responsibility, as usual, to initiate such a draft resolution.

We shall do our best to service the Committee as well as possible and to continue to respond very promptly to any suggestions from members of the Committee, especially from the Chairman and the Bureau.

The Chairman: I thank delegations for their kind words addressed to me.

In conclusion, I wish on behalf of the Committee and my own personal behalf to extend our profound appreciation to the interpreters for a job very well done. We thank them very much and appreciate their efforts, tolerance and patience, which we hope that they will be able to extend to us in the future.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.